Prioritizing Racial Equity
Preliminary 90 Day Update for the City of Santa Ana
Health Equity, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion Strategic Plan via a lived experience systems transformation framework:
Informed by People with Lived Experience of Inequities
Part 1

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About the Author:

Dr. Bernice B. Rumala comes from humble beginnings and this has fueled her unwavering commitment to intersectoral systems transformation, equity, health equity, diversity, and inclusion. Dr. Rumala has interdisciplinary expertise and earned her Ph.D. and 3 Master's degrees from Columbia University, served as a Fogarty-Fulbright, and Harvard Fellow, and previously as a senior consultant for the United Nations. For more than twenty years, she has served as a change agent in the public, private, academic, and international sectors with a special focus on developing new programs, systems transformation, addressing systemic racism, and engaging people with lived experiences of inequities. Having earned a certificate in international cybersecurity threats, Dr. Rumala's interests have also been expanded into cybersecurity and equity given the ongoing vulnerabilities in the cyberinfrastructure that impact global and local populations, many of whom do not have the resources or policies in place for protection. Dr. Rumala has lived experience of the ongoing challenges of severe inequities and the detrimental impacts to individuals and communities, specifically historically oppressed populations. This is unacceptable to her and should not be the norm. She has had global experiences in stable regions as well as regions impacted by war, conflict, and instability, including Iraq where she worked for the United Nations. She continues to contribute her expertise as a global and local leader, consultant, and educator. Her leadership, scholarly work, and advocacy center on engaging people with lived experiences of inequities for systems transformation. She is also the Founding Director for the People with Lived Experience Institute and Founding Editor in Chief for the Journal of People with Lived Experience (JPLE), both labor of love initiatives, centered on engaging people with lived experiences of inequities and non-traditional stakeholders in systems transformation. Dr. Rumala continues to be passionately involved in initiatives for equity, health equity, social justice, community engagement, community-based participatory research, the arts, inter-professional/interdisciplinary collaborations, mentoring, and the intersection of cyberinfrastructure with equity. Dr. Rumala is committed to communities thriving and not just surviving.

Equity and Inclusion in processes lead to equity and inclusion in outcomes
- Dr. Bernice B Rumala

Lived Experience # 1
It is 5:00 am and Veronica, a street vendor, begins one of three jobs that she has for survival. Veronica and her multi-generational family have yet to realize the dream of thriving due to ongoing inequities. Her street vending business has been targeted multiple times. The narratives of daily survival are not unique to Veronica.

Lived Experience #2
As a leader and scholar-activist, I have yet to thrive due to ongoing systemic inequities and racism stemming from inequitable policies, inequitable access, and inequitable decision-making. My voice and leadership for systems transformation are informed by my lived experience of inequities.

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> Thriving Definition (Wikipedia)
> Thriving is a condition beyond mere survival, implying growth and positive development

Goal: For communities impacted by inequities to thrive to full potential and not just survive day to day.

Understanding the historical root of inequities
People of color face discriminatory practices daily that are rooted in structural racism via systems, policies, and practices. Historic systemic racism and exclusionary practices such as redlining and voter discrimination inform the present-day inequities such as displacement, gentrification, and racial profiling. Institutional racism creates generational trauma for people of color and is pervasive. The color-blind tenet of the original civil rights legislation was founded on equality, which assumes that everyone receives the same treatment, however, the inherent flaw is that it did not take into account that in everyone receiving the same treatment, not everyone experiences the same barriers. For example, historic practices of redlining prevented people of color from owning property and having generational wealth, impacts of which we still see today. Predatory lending that has targeted communities that I have lived in has further increased these disparities. Therefore, an equity-based approach is paramount because equity recognizes that not everyone has access to the same opportunities and resources and therefore for communities to thrive, this must be taken into account. This preliminary strategic plan is presented from the lens of equity as both a process result and outcome result.

The truth became very vivid to debunk the false narratives when the world stopped to witness George Floyd murdered amid a pandemic. The world saw the systemic racism that pre-existed for many years manifest clearly.

Myth #1: I do not see color

Truth # 1: Not seeing color is erasing the lived experience and beauty of people of color

Myth #2: There is no racism
No one is racist

Truth #2: We all engage in racist systems

Myth #3: Do not have difficult conversations and smile, everything will be okay

Truth #3: Racism needs to be explicitly addressed

Reflection Exercise – What are your thoughts on the myths and truths? What are some long-held beliefs you have had?

Understanding Health Equity

Achieving optimum health is a human right. Health Equity is the opportunity for all to achieve optimum health by eliminating barriers. Present barriers to health equity have historical roots in systems and processes resulting in structural racism, discrimination, and oppression of marginalized groups of racial and ethnic minorities who have not had access to the same resources to achieve health equity. Achieving health equity means eliminating barriers such as racism, poverty, powerlessness, lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, health care, safe environments, quality education, and housing.

The aforementioned social determinants that affect where we live, work, play and engage impact the City of Santa Ana within interconnected systems, and therefore racial equity strategies must address interconnected systems via a non-siloed partnership approach. This approach must include populations most impacted, who are people with lived

experience of inequities, at the forefront as decision-makers and the source of solutions in informing systems transformation for equity and health equity. This involves naming the inequities, addressing the root causes of inequities, and authentic community engagement for sustainability versus a check-box approach.

Photovoice: Can you hear me? Interconnected systems impacting equity must be addressed from the root causes.

Figure 1: Dr. Bernice B Rumala (2021) Systems Transformation: My lived experience on the inequities of the resilience model through interconnected systems
Animation: https://youtu.be/S-jUkPiG7IE

Reference: Rumala, BB (2021). Rethinking the resilience model in the context of inequities. Journal of the People with Lived Experience Institute, 1(1), 4-6 10.5281/zenodo.4995838 https://zenodo.org/record/4995839#.Yijg_HrMK5d

Background

In the wake of inequities that have existed for many years for marginalized populations in the City of Santa Ana, in 2021 the city began to have preliminary starter conversations on diversity, equity, health equity, and inclusion and what it could look like that converged with the stark inequities that became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a new endeavor for The City of Santa Ana and with all new initiatives that are introduced within existing systems that are built on a foundation of inequities including structural racism, it requires a deliberate and intentional effort to explicitly name the inequities, dismantle the inequities, and address in policies and practices both internally and externally for the benefit of marginalized and oppressed communities to thrive. The present inequities have historical roots that must be addressed.

In 2021, the following were highlighted for the inaugural role for the City of Santa Ana:

- Plans, directs, organizes, coordinates, and evaluates the City's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and programs aimed at advancing racial equity
- Develops, supports, and advocates for transformational policies and system-wide changes that address root causes of inequities
- Advocates to encourage equity in the creation, administration, and communication of City services.
- Addresses inclusion and racial equity barriers and creates access to opportunity; assesses community needs and promotes community cohesion.
- Serves as the City's subject matter expert and contact for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and programs to staff, elected officials, businesses, and community members
- Advises on topics related to advancing racial, gender, ethnic, and social equity
- Develops systems for reporting City incidents of inequity.
- Assesses the impact of race, ethnicity, gender, and social factors on City organizational culture, policies, practices, and procedures.
- Develops and monitors the City's comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan.
- Recommends diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, policies, and procedures
- Creates visibility and awareness of equity as an economic imperative.
- Collaborates with departments in developing, implementing, and monitoring programs that encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization
- Leads multi-department diversity teams.
- Collaborates with community partners to develop and coordinate community outreach strategies, training, and initiatives to educate the community and businesses on how to recognize, accommodate, and appreciate diversity and

support the advancement of inclusion, and gender and racial equity goals and objectives; provide public information and promotional materials

- Researches applies for, and manages grants and other resources that support advancing race and equity work
- Assists with the development and monitoring of diversity, equity, and inclusion program budget and resources across departments.
- Creates correspondence and presentations addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion that support strategies to address equity priorities and concerns

Operational Definitions - Shared language matters

For this equity work, language matters. Therefore, it is important to have a shared language and understanding of equity terminology for proceeding with the important system transformation that needs to occur.

The following are select operational definitions and shared language:

Institutional Racism
"Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. Institutional racism manifests in the interaction of policies and practices within and across an institution both intentionally and unintentionally. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

Examples of Institutional Racism:
Government policies that explicitly restricted the ability of people to get loans to buy or improve their homes in neighborhoods with high concentrations of African Americans (also known as "red-lining").
City sanitation department policies that concentrate trash transfer stations and other environmental hazards disproportionately in communities of color"

Reference: Racial Equity Tools Glossary. https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary

Health Equity

Health Equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible by eliminating poverty, racism, etc. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination (i.e., racism), and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care. People's living conditions are often made worse by discrimination, stereotyping, and prejudice based on sex, gender, age, race, ethnicity, or disability, among other factors. Discriminatory practices are often embedded in institutional and systems processes, leading to groups being under-represented in decision-making at all levels or underserved. Progressively realizing the right to health means systematically identifying and eliminating inequities resulting from differences in health and in overall living conditions.

Reference: *World Health Organization,* **https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-equity#tab=tab_1** *; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation* **https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2017/05/what-is-health-equity-.html**

Racial Equity

"Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or that fail to eliminate them." Racial equity is both an outcome and a process.

Reference: Racial Equity Tools Glossary.
https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary

People with Lived Experience

People with Lived Experience - People with lived experience of inequities are also known as oppressed and marginalized populations. People with lived experience are front-line experts on inequities experienced. People with lived experience have knowledge of a system, process, or issue because of its impact on daily life. Therefore, it is important to prioritize the voices of people with lived experience of inequities as decision-makers in the beginning for equity and systems transformation

Reference: The People with Lived Experience Institute,
https://pleinstitute.org/

Inclusion

Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policymaking in a way that shares power.

Reference: Racial Equity Tools Glossary.
https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary

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Why Racial Equity?

The foundation of good governance begins with racial equity so that communities of color that have been historically oppressed and marginalized have the opportunity to thrive to their fullest potential. This is possible through partnerships that engage people with lived experiences most impacted by inequities. Good governance for people of color means that processes mature and grow to address inequities that are rooted in a history of structural racism within policies that impact decision-making.

Race is a predictor of social determinants such as where we work, live, play and also determines our interactions with various systems including the health, education, justice systems, etc. The inequities seen today are rooted in systemic racism and historic legacies that have promoted exclusion for communities of color, marginalized, and oppressed populations who have not been adequately represented in high-level decision-making. These racial inequities are rooted in all levels of government and have been normalized in policy, practices, and law to advantage the privileged and disadvantage people of color. While there have been significant strides in present-day laws as a result of civil rights, many practices within governments became race-neutral further perpetuating inequities for communities of color. These inequities factor into decision making impacting the most marginalized. Understanding the historical precedence leading to present-day inequities assists with naming the roots and dismantling the inequities to inform equitable policy and decision making.

This preliminary strategic plan is centered on sustainability so that equity in processes informs equity in outcomes. Oftentimes, an organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are deferred to one individual from a marginalized population. This is not sustainable and it is not a best practice. In an effort to operationalize equity into authentic practice, the implementation of inclusion, diversity, equity and anti-racism efforts cannot be the sole responsibility of individuals from oppressed and marginalized populations. It must be a shared responsibility to prioritize these efforts for systems transformation within the organizational culture in partnership with staff at every level, elected officials, community, academics, and businesses as part of a public-private partnership for shared responsibility and accountability. It is also critical that dialogue about race equity becomes the norm as part of operationalizing equity to inform organizational culture, policies, practices, and decision making.

Lessons learned in brief
- Equity positionality is very important
- Historic structural racism leading to present-day inequities must first be named and then dismantled to eliminate barriers to equity
- Authentic engagement of community versus a check-box approach is paramount

Bright Spots
- The community is eager for equity and inclusion to inform change and systems transformation to thrive
- There have been some initial victories for the city council in addressing some community-driven equity concerns (Source: In-person attendance at City Council meetings and engagement with the community from December 2021 to March 2022)

Challenges and solutions informed by preliminary listening sessions in the first 90 days

Challenges/Opportunities for Systems Transformation	Solutions
Authentic community engagement	The engagement of people with lived experiences impacted by inequities is needed to dismantle historical barriers. This should include involvement of the community in policies, decision making, co-designing of plans, programs, and building systems. This should also include investing resources to break down social, historical, and institutional barriers and positively transform how communities of color meaningfully engage in decisions and the design of policies, programs, and plans

Stakeholders including the majority of staff have limited knowledge of diversity, equity, and inclusion	Capacity building of department leadership and all staff integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion as part of work responsibilities
Lack of safe spaces for open and honest conversations for transparency and accountability of equity, diversity, and inclusion	Transform organizational culture through the creation of safe spaces to have a candid dialogue on equity and structural racism
Silos are a barrier for staff to collaborate and also engage the community	Establish/build upon multi-sectoral teams consisting of individuals at each level of the organization in partnership with community stakeholders at the decision-making table to develop meaningful partnerships and relationship building.
There is limited understanding by most hiring managers on integrating equity in the hiring process	Develop the capacity of hiring managers through racial equity training
Equity responsive budgeting and procurement process	Equity Responsive Budgeting and Procurement Training prioritizes persons of color most impacted by inequities.

Strategies in brief

A) Explicitly name the inequities

Inequities must first be named before they can be dismantled. Therefore, this first strategy will center on explicitly naming the inequities in partnership with communities most impacted to address the institutional and structural racism that has been created and become the norm in policies to inform inequitable practices

B) Systems transformation through organizational capacity building

Changing organizational culture towards equity requires reducing silos and building capacity through all levels of the organizational hierarchy from grassroots to executive leadership for sustainability. This needs to occur in collaboration with racial equity experts.

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C) Integrating racial equity approach and lens
Recognizing that historic inequities have developed over many years, integrating a racial equity lens will enable an intentional approach to transforming existing inequitable policies, practices, and programs.

D) Data - Understanding the stories of those most impacted by inequities
The equity in processes should result in equity in outcomes. The lived experience stories of those most impacted by inequities should help to contextualize the data and inform solutions. From the data, it is important to determine: Who is collecting the data and what type of data is being collected? Who is benefiting? Who is being harmed? How much of a difference was made for people with lived experiences of inequities?

E) Reducing the silos through partnerships
For sustainability, partnership through multi-agency efforts with community, businesses, academia will build a culture to prioritize racial equity

F) Expedited Timeliness
Addressing structural racism is a matter of life or death for impacted communities. Accepting the norms of inequities creates further harm to the communities served. Hence, this requires urgent prioritization so that historically oppressed and marginalized populations can thrive. This will require institutional transparency and accountability for racial equity.

The above requires an iterative process of
- Establishing goals for equitable outcomes
- An evidence-based data-driven approach for populations most impacted
- Understanding historical context and impacts on present-day conditions
- Engaging people with lived experience of inequities
- Develop race equity as both a process and outcome
- Implement changes with an accountability feedback loop

The route through which racial equity can be integrated through various stakeholders is as follows:

Staff: Using the integration of tools for racial equity into processes, program development, and service delivery is important. This also includes integrating a racial equity lens in budget proposals

Elected Officials: A racial equity lens enables elected officials to review city priorities and provide guidance on communities most impacted by inequities through exploring: Who benefits? Who is harmed? Are populations most impacted by the inequities involved in decisions early on? Elected officials have tremendous agency in moving the equity needle for communities to thrive.

Community Engagement Stakeholders: Community engagement stakeholders can have a strong voice for government racial equity accountability for the benefit of populations most impacted by inequities. Additionally, youth engagement and voice as part of the process are critical.

This is an aspirational message of the change that is possible:

Aspirational Next Steps - Poem
Rising Beyond
by Dr. Bernice B Malaika Rumala (2022)

Rising Beyond From the
deep trenches A colorful
Phoenix
rising from the ashes of vulture oppression
As suited prison guards lurk
The village speaks
The tribe speaks of right to live
To live with dignity and thrive
Of necessary transformation
Weaponized policy transformed into healing
Hidden voices emerge
In unity, beneath the mask
Stripping plastered smiles
Acts founded on truth
By those most impacted
To dismantle inequities
Building bridges of change
From equity to thriving
Rising Beyond

This is a Call to Action to rising Beyond for Systems Transformation

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Resources

City of Santa Ana City Council Meeting, March 1st, 2022
https://youtu.be/CBBWQmA4wlw

Government Alliance on Race and Equity https://www.racialequityalliance.org/

Racial Equity Tools https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary

People with Lived Experience Institute https://pleinstitute.org/

Reflection Notes

Write Your Reflections and Action Next Steps Here

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